WESTWARD FOR SMELTS.

WESTWARD FOR SMELTS,

AN EARLY

Collection of Stories.

EDITED BY

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PREFACE.

THE following collection of tales is reprinted from a tract, supposed to be unique, preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge. Steevens mentions an edition of 1603, but no copy bearing that date is now known to exist; and Mr. Collier believes, but without assigning any reason beyond that afforded by negative evidence, that the impression of 1620 is the earliest. The question is of some importance, for, supposing Steevens be correct, Shakespeare might have read *Westward for Smelts* before the composition of Cymbeline. In the latter case, he must have referred to an earlier version of the tale on which that drama is founded, probably to Boccaccio.

Readers of medieval literature will at once recognize the tales of the fishwives as modernized versions of stories which had long previously been published in various collections and in great varieties of form. They are not, however, to be viewed as important illustrations of the latter: it is rather as exhibiting the popular English literature of that age that they are to be regarded as worthy of publication. Their curiosity and value in this respect will be at once acknowledged.

WORCESTER,
August 9th, 1848.

WESTWARD

FOR

SMELTS,

OR,

The Water-man's fare of mad merry Western wenches
whose tongues, albeit like Bell-clappers they neuer
leaue ringing, yet their tales are sweet, and
will much content you.

Written by Kinde Kit of Kingstone.

LONDON,

Printed for JOHN TRUNDLE, and are to be sold at his shop in Barbican,
at the signe of the No-body.

1620.

TO THE READER.

Reader, for thy pleasure have I (this once) left my oare and stretcher, and stretched my wit, to set downe the honest mirth of my merry fare fishwives : if I have pleased thee, I am fully contented, and aske no more for my fare : if not, I have lost both my labour, and the reward I hoped for from thee, and do vow never more to trouble you with any other words than, " Will you have a paire of oares ?" But my hopes are better, cause you (looking at my hands) for no other then freshwater poetry, shall not be deceived, and therefore not offended. So without any fawning tricks (which are things used too much in these times) I take my leave, wishing thee health ; and if thou sit hard, my boat's cushions. Farewell.

Yours to command,

Kinde Kit of Kingstone.

WESTWARD FOR SMELTS.

In that selected time of the yeere, when no man is suffered to be a mutton-monger, without a speciall priviledge from those in authoritie: and no man is licensed to enjoy a flesh-bit, but those who are so weake, that the very sight contents their appetite: yet every man desireth flesh, that is no whore-master. When butchers goe to beare-baytings on Thursdayes, leaving their wives and prentises making pricks in shops halfe shut up, like houses infected of the plague: when at the same time fishmongers are in the height of pride, dashing water in their ill-sented street, like a troop of porposes at Flushing Head. When the cookes spits are hung up like pikes in a court of gard, and their dripping-pans (like targets in a country justice's hall) bee mouldie for want of use. At this time of the yeere, the pudding-house at Brooke's wharfe is watched by the Hollanders eeles-ships, lest the inhabitants, contrarie to the law, should spill the bloud of innocents, which would be greatly to the hinderance of these butter-boxes.* In briefe, it is the kitchin-stuffe wives vacation, which makes them runne to the hedge for

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* A cant term for Dutchmen. See Miege, in v.

better maintenance. Every one knowes this was Lent time, a time profitable onely for those that deale with liquid commodities: for none but fish must be eaten, which never doth digest well (as some physicions of this time hold opinion) except it swimme twice after it comes forth the water: that is, first in butter, so to be eaten: then in wine or beere after it is eaten. Now how chargeable this last liquor is, aske in prisons of prodigals, who have paid well for it: and how profitable to the sellers, aske of those aldermen that have had their beginning by it.

In this time of Lent, I being in the waterman's garrison of Queen-hive (whereof I am a souldier) and having no imploiment, I went with an intent to incounter with that most valiant and hardy champion of Queen-hive, commonly called by the name of Red Knight;* one who hath overthrowne many, yet never was himselfe dismounted, or had the least foyle: yet doth hee deny to grapple with none, but continually standeth ready to oppose himselfe against any that dare be his opposite, against whom he hath alway the better: for if they yeeld to him in the right of his conquest, he taketh from them a certaine summe of money, according to the time that they have held out: but if they scorne to yeeld, hee not onely taketh from them their goods, but likewise with his sore blowes he taketh from them their sences, making them often to

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* The Red Knight is an ale-house signe at Queen-hive, where the watermen use to tipple. [Mar. note in Orig.]

fall at his castle gate for dead, voiding at the mouth abundance of filth caused by his strokes.

I had not long held combate with this knight, but my man came running in, telling mee he had a fare West-ward. This newes made me give over the combate, but with some small losse, for hee would not lose his ancient priviledge; so I giving him twopence, had free liberty to passe his gates, where I found my fare, which were a company of Westerne fishwives, who, having made a good market, with their heads full of wine, and their purses ful of coine, were desirous to go homeward. We agreed quickly, and the boy layd the cushions: I put them in the boat, and we lanched into the deepe, Neptune bee our speed, WESTWARD FOR SMELTS. Having passed the troublesome places of the Thames (where the wherries runne to and fro like weavers shuttles) and being at Lambeth, I might perceive all my fishwives begin to nod. I, fearing they were in a sound,* with my oare sprinkled a little coole water in their faces, which made them all to awake: which I perceiving, bid them rowze themselves up, and to continue their mirth, and keepe them from melancholy sleepe, and I would straine the best voice I had. They prayed me so to doe, but yet not to cloy their eares with an old fidler's song, as *Riding to Rumford*, or, *All in a garden greene.* I said I scorned so to do, for I would give them a new one, which neither punke, fidler, or ballad-singer had ever polluted with their

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* *Swoon.* A common archaism.

unsavorie breath: the subject was, I told them, of a serving-man and his mistris. They liked the subject well, and intreated me to proceed, promising that each of them would requite my song with a tale. I said I was content, and would thinke well of their requitals. So they being all still, I began in this manner;

Fairer than the fairest,
Brighter than the rarest,
Was the comely creature which I saw.
Her lookes they were attractive,
And her body active,
All beholders' sences for to draw.
I honour still this comely creature,
And ever will doe while I live:
And for her grace and goodly feature,
All honours due to her I'le give.

When I first beheld her,
O had Cupid will'd her,
For to favour him that lov'd her best!
Joyes had me possessed,
Sorrowes had not pressed,
On my grieved heart that takes no rest.
I thinke on her with adoration,
I musing set upon her beauty:
On her is all my meditation,
Yet were to her were but my duty.

She herselfe is witty,
All her parts are pretty,
Nature in her forme hath shewed her skill:
Her bright beauty maz'd me,
All her parts well pleas'd me:
For of pleasant sights I had my fill.

Then 'gan her hand for to uncover
Her whitest neck, and soundest pap :
Than gan I farder to discover
Most pleasing sights, yet wayl'd my hap.

Still I stood obscured,
And these sights indured :
Yet I to this goddesse durst not speake.
Had I made a tryall,
Her most sad deniall,
My observant heart, oh ! it would breake.
Therefore will I rest contented,
With private pleasures that I viewed ;
And never with love will be tormented,
Yet love I her for that she shewed.

Having thus ended, I asked them how they liked my song : they said little to it. At last, Well, quoth a venerable matron, or rather a matron of venery, that sate on a cushion at the upper end of the boat, let us now performe our promises to him in telling every one her tale : and since I shall land first, I will begin first : so the waterman shall be sure of his requittall promised by us, which shall be fishwives tales, that are wholesome, though but homely : so set merrily to Brainford, my master. I liked this well, and cause I would heare them all out, I made but slow haste : And cause you shall have some knowledge what rare piece this fishwife of Brainford was, I will deseribe her best and outward parts.*

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* *Outward parts.* An expression used by Shakespeare in his *Merchant of Venice*, act iii. sc. 2.

This fishwife stout,
That led the rout,
At Brainford dwelt;
She sometimes dealt
With flesh exchange;
But now, though strange,
She gave it ore,
And knew no whore.
She was well set,
Her body met,*
Two yards was found:
Her head from ground
Was not so hie.
She went awry.
Her face was great;
She stunke of sweat.
Let it suffice,
She had large eyes;
And a low brow;
Much like a sow,
That sindg'd had bin,
Appear'd her chin,
For it was hayr'd.
Her nose was mar'd,
For't had a gap,
By great mishap,
As you shall heare;
Then give good eare.

THE FISHWIFE'S TALE OF BRAINFORD.†

In Windsor, not long agoe, dwelt a sumpter-man, who had to wife a very faire (but something wanton)

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* Measured.

† Malone refers to this tale as having probably led Shakespeare to lay the scene of Falstaff's love adventures at Windsor. There seem to be no real grounds for such a conjecture.

creature, over whom (not without cause) he was something jealous, yet had hee never any proofe of her inconstancie: but he feared he was, or should be a cuckold, and therefore prevented it so much as he could by restraining her libertie: but this did but set an edge to her wanton appetite, and was a provocative to her lust (for what women are restrained from they most desire) for long hee could not hold his watchfull eye over her, 'cause his businesse call'd him away, which alway lay farre from home. He, being to depart from home, bethought himselfe what he were best to do: put another in trust with his wife he durst not, for no greater shame is there to a man, then to be knowne jealous over his wife: himselfe could tarry no longer at home for feare of losing his place, and then his living was gone: thus was hee troubled in minde, not knowing what to doe. Now he repented himselfe that he had used his wife so ill, which had given her cause to hate him, and procure him a mischiefe: for he saw that he had no other way now to take, but to put his credit into his wives hands: therefore the day and night before hee went from home, he used her extraordinary kindely, making more on her then the first day they were married. His wife marvelled at this suddaine change, and though she liked this usage well, yet she thought never the better of him in her heart, and in her outward carriage bare herselfe as before, which was ever modestly in his sight. The morning being come that he was to depart from home (after many sweet kisses, and kind embraces given by him)

hee said: Sweet honey, I cannot blame thee, that thou takest my usage heretofore unkindly: but if thou knewest (as I meane to shew thee) what my intent was, thou wilt change that bad thought for a better liking of me. Know then, my love, that I used thee thus strangely, to know how deepe thy love was settled on me, (for to use a friend frowardly, tryes her love, in forbearance of his injuries, and in seeking to please him), which I have found by proofe immoveable. Oh, my more then deare wife, thy love is fixed sure on me, and not to be removed by any crosse* whatsoever. Thus did hee seeke to unsnare himselfe, but was caught faster, for his wife, perceiving his jealousie, vowed to be revenged, and give him good and sufficient cause to thinke himselfe a cuckolde; and, with very joy to see him creepe to her after this manner, she let fall a few teares, which proceeded rather of inward laughter than any griefe. Hee, seeing this, thought they proceeded from pure love, yet did hee not thorowly trust her, but minded to return ere she was aware of him. To be short, they broke their fasts together, and lovingly parted. His wife, beeing glad of this, sent for a woman in the towne, one that was the procurer of her friend, to whom she told all that had hapned betweene her husband and herselfe, requesting her in all haste to give her friend notice that her husband was now from home, and that shee would meete him when and where-soever he pleased. The old woman, glad of this, gave

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* Misfortune. Cf. *Mids. Night's Dream*, i. 1.

her lover to understand of this good hap, who soone met her at a place in the towne, where they usually met, where they plumed the sumpter-man's cap. There she gave the old woman a key which would open her doore, by which meanes shee might come to the speech of her at any time of the night without knocking, so carefull was she to keepe herselfe cleere and spotlesse in the eyes of her neighbours, who would not have thought well of her, if they had heard noise at her doore in the night, and her husband from home. Having passed the time away in loving complements, they parted, each going their severall wayes, not any one of her neighbours mistrusting her, she bare herselfe so cunningly modest. Her husband, being on his journey, following his sumpter-horse, thought his wife at home, working like a good huswife (when, perchance, she was following a station she tooke more delight in then he, poor man, did in his); yet put he no more trust in her than he was forced to doe, for hee dispatches his businesse so soone as hee could, and returned three dayes sooner then he promised her. When he came home, he knocked at the doore: there might he knocke long enough for his wife, who was knocking the vintner's pots with her lover. He, having no answere, began to curse and ban, bidding a pope* on all whores. His neighbours began to perswade him, telling him that she went but new forth, and would returne suddenly againe; and just at that instant

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* An oath not uncommon in writers of this date.

came she homeward, not knowing her good man was returned, for she had appointed the old woman to come and call her that night. Seeing her husband, you may judge what a taking* this poore woman was in: back she durst not goe, for that would have sharpened his rage; and, if shee went forward, she was sure of some severe punishment; yet, taking courage, on she went. Her husband entertained her with halfe a doozen gadding queans,† and such like words, and she excused her selfe so well as she could. But, to be briefe, in adores they went: then made he the doore fast, and came to her (who was almost dead with feare that her close play now would be descride), saying, Thou whore, long time have I doubted this looseness in thy life, which I now have plaine proofe of by thy gadding in my absence, and doe thou at this present looke for no other thing at my hands then reward fit for so vilde a creature as a whore is. At these words she would have skreeked out; but he stopped her mouth, pulling withall a rusty dagger from his side, vowing to scowre it with her bloud, if shee did but offer to open her mouth. She, poore creature, forced more with feare then with duty, held her peace, while hee bound her to a post hard by the dore, vowing she should stand there al night to coole her hot bloud. Having done this, about ten of the clock he went to bed, telling her that he meant not to sleepe, but watch her if she durst

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* Fright or consternation. *Shak.*

† That is, called her those names six times.

once open her mouth; but he was better then his word, though hee held it not, for he was no sooner in bed but he fell fast asleepe, being wearied with riding. Long had not he beene so, but the old woman came and opened the dore with the key that the sumpter-man's wife had given her, and was going to the bed which the sumpter-man lay upon to call his wife; but, as she passed by, the poor woman that was bound to her good behaviour, call'd her by name (yet very softly), saying, Mother Jone, I am heere, mother Jone, pray goe no furder, and speake softly, for my husband, mother Jone, is abed. This good old woman went to her, and, finding her bound, asked her the cause; to whom the afflicted wife related (with still speech, which is contrary to women's nature) every circumstance, for she knew her husband fast enough for three houres. Is that all? said the old woman; then feare not but you shal enjoy your friend's bed: with that she unloosed her. The sumpter man's wife marvelled what she meant to doe, saying, Mother, what meane you? this is not the way that I must take to cleere my selfe. Alas! should he wake, and finde me gone to-morrow, he will kill mee in his rage. Content you, said the old wife, I will bide the brunt of all; and heere will I stand tyed to this post till you returne, which I pray let be so soone as you can. This wanton wife praised her counsell, and imbraces the same, and leaving the old woman bound (as she desired) in her place, she went to her lusty lover, who long time had expected her, to whom she related her husband's unluckie com-

ming home, her ill usage, and the old woman's kindnesse; for all which he was sorrie, but could not mend, onely hee promised to reward this kinde woman call'd Mother Jone: so leaving that talke they fell to other. The sumpter-man, who could not soundly sleepe, because still he dreamed of hornes and cuckolds, wakened not long after his wife was gone, and, being wakened, he fell to talking after this manner: Now, you queane, is it good gadding? is your hote bloud cooled yet with cold ayre? Will your insatiable desires be allayed with hunger and cold? If they be not, thou arrant whore, I will tye thee thus up, not onely nine dayes, but nineteene times nine dayes, till thou hast lost this hote and damnable pride of thine. Ile doo't, whore, I will, I sweare I will. This good old woman, hearing him rayle thus frantickly, wished (with all her heart) herselfe out of doores, and his wife in her old place. Shee durst not speake to him, for feare she should be knowne by her speech to bee another, and not his wife; and hee lay still calling to her, asking if her hote desires were cooled. At length hee, hearing her make no answere, thought her to be sullen, and bid her speak to him, or else she should repent it (yet durst not the old wife speake). Hee, hearing no speech, rose up, and took his knife, swearing hee would marke her for a whore, and with those words he ranne to her, and cut her over the nose; all this the old woman indured quietly, knowing her words would have but increased her punishment. To bed went he againe, with such words as hee used before, saying that, since

her bloud would not coole, he would let it out. Having lyen a while, he fell asleepe, leaving old Jone bleeding at nose, where shee stood till three of the clocke in the morning, at which time this honest lasse (the sumpter-man's wife) came home. When she had quietly opened the doore, she went to the old woman, asking her how shee had sped. Marry, quoth shee, as I would wish my enemies to speed—ill! I pray unbinde me, or I shall bleed to death. The good wife was sorry to heare that she had received such hurt, but fane gladder that it did not happen unto herselfe; so, unbinding her, she stood in her place. Homeward went the old woman, bethinking herselfe all the way how she might excuse that hurt to her husband. At last she had one (for excuses are never further off women then their apron strings), which was this—she went home to her husband, who was a mason, and went every morning betimes to worke out of the towne; him she calleth, telling him it was time to goe to worke. The silly man rose, and, being ready to goe, he missed a chisell (which his wife had hid), and he went up and downe groping for it in the darke, praying his wife to helpe him to looke for it. She made as she had sought for it, but, instead of that, she gave him a sharpe knife (which a butcher had brought to grinding); he, catching at this suddenly (as one being in haste), cut all his fingers, so that with anger he threw the knife to the earth, cursing his wife that gave it him. Presently, upon the fall of the knife, she cryed out that shee was hurt. The mason, being amazed, went and lighted a

candle, and, returning, he found his wife's nose cut. The silly man (perswading himselfe that hee had done it with hurling the knife) intreated her to forgive him, for he protested that hee thought her no hurt when hee did it; then fetched he a surgeon, who cunningly stitched it up, that it was little whole in a short time. The sumpter-man all this while did thinke how he was beguiled, who, when he was awaked, lighted a candle to see what hurt he had done his wife in his rage. He comming neere her, and seeing her face whole, stood in a maze, not knowing what to thinke on it, for he was sure that he had cut her nose. His wife, seeing him stand in this maner, asked him what he did ayle, and why he gazed so on her, as though he knew her not. Pardon mee, wife, quoth he, for this night hath a miracle beene wrought; I doe see plainely that the heavens will not suffer the innocent to suffer harme. Then fetched hee his knife, which was all bloudy, saying, Deare wife, with this knife did I give thee, this present night, a wound on the face, the which, most miraculously, is whole, which is a signe thou art free and spotlesse, and so will I ever hold thee. His wife said little (for feare of laughing), onely shee said she knew Heaven would defend the innocent; so they went to bed lovingly together, he vowing never to thinke amisse on her. So had she more libertie then before, and the old woman had gold for her wound, which wound was so well cured (I thanke God!) that you can scarce see it on my nose! Hereat they all laughed, saying she had told a good tale for herselfe; at which

she bit her lip, to think how she was so very a foole to betray herselfe. But, knowing that excuses would but make her more suspected, she held her tongue, giving the next leave to speake.

The next that sate to her was a fishwife of Stand on the Greene, who said her tale was pleasant, but scarce honest :* she taxed women with too much immodestie: to salve which, she would tell the adventures of a poore gentlewoman, that was used unkindly by her husband. They all liked this well, and intreated her to proceede: which she willingly consented unto.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHWIFE OF STAND ON THE GREENE.

This wife was leane,
Shee went full cleane.
Her breath not strong,
Her body long;
She looked pale,
Yet loved good ale.
Here teeth were rot,
Her tongue was not.
Well could she chat
Of this and that.
Her lips were white,
And sharpe her sight.
Her cheekes were thin,
So was her chin,
And something hook'd,
Her nose was crook'd:
They would have kist,
But that they wist

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* Honourable; chaste.

Her mouth was let,
That twixt was set.
Twice thirtie yeeres,
Sha'd past with cares,
And honest life,
And still was wife.
This wife was wise,
But not precise:
Thus gan she tell:
Pray marke it well.

*Her tale.**—In the troublesome reigne of King Henry the sixt, there dwelt in Waltam (not farre from London) a gentleman, which had to wife a creature most beautifull: so that in her time there were few found that matched her, (none at all that excelled her), so excellent were the gifts that nature had bestowed on her. In body was she not onely so rare, and unparalleld, but also in her gifts of minde: so that this creature, it seemed that grace and nature strove who should excell each other in their gifts toward her. The gentleman her husband thought himselfe so happy in his choice, that he beleeved, in choosing her, he tooke hold of that blessing which heaven proffereth every man once in his life. Long did not this opinion hold for currant; for in his height of love, he began so to hate her, that he sought her death: the cause I will tell you. Having businesse one day to London, he

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* This tale is borrowed from Boccaccio, whose novel is employed by Shakespeare in *Cymbeline*. It has been reprinted in Malone's *Shakespeare*, ed. 1821, vol. xiii.

tooke his leave very kindly of his wife, and accompanied with one man, he rode to London: being toward night, he tooke up his inne, and to be briefe, he went to supper amongst other gentlemen. Amongst other talke at table, one tooke occasion to speake of women, and what excellent creatures they were, so long as they continued loyall* to man. To whom answered one saying: This is truth, sir: so is the divel good so long as he doth no harme, which is meaner: his goodnes and womens loyaltie will come both in one yeere, but it is so farre off, that none in this age shall live to see it. This gentleman, loving his wife dearely, (and knowing her to be free from this uncivill gentlemans general taxation of women), in her behalfe said: Sir, you are too bitter against the sexe of women, and doe ill (for some ones sake that hath proved false to you) to taxe the generalitie of women-kinde with lightnesse: and but I would not be uncounted uncivill amongst these gentlemen, I would give you the reply that approved untruth deserveth: you know my meaning, sir: construe my words as you please: excuse me, gentlemen, if I be uncivill: I answere in the behalfe of one, who is as free from disloyaltie, as the sunne from darknes, or the fire from cold.† Pray, sir, said the other, since wee are opposite in opinions, let us rather talke like lawyers, that wee may bee quickly

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* Chaste. See *Othello*, act iv. sc. 2.

† This serves to illustrate a passage in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, act iv. sc. 4, "I rather will suspect the sun with cold, than thee with wantonness." The folios incorrectly read *gold*.

friends againe, then like souldiers which end their words with blowes. Perhaps this woman, that you answere for, is chaste, but yet against her will: for many women are honest, 'cause they have not the meanes and opportunitie to bee dis-honest (so is a thiefe true in prison, 'cause he hath nothing to steale): had I but opportunitie, and knew this same saint you so adore, I would pawne my life and whole estate, in a short while to bring you some manifest token of her disloyaltie.* Sir, you are yong in the knowledge of womens slights; your want of experience makes you too credulous: therefore be not abused. This speech of his made the gentleman more out of patience then before, so that with much adoe he helde himselfe from offering violence: but his anger being a little over, hee said, Sir, I doe verily beleeve that this vaine speech of yours proceedeth rather from a loose and ill manner'd minde, then of any experience you have had of womens loosenes: and since you thinke yourselfe so cunning in that divellish art of corrupting womens chastitie, I will lay downe heere a hundred pounds, against which you shall lay fifty pounds, and before these gentlemen I promise you, if that within a moneths space you bring me any token of this gentlewomans disloyaltie (for whose sake I have spoken in the behalfe of all women) I doe freely give you leave to injoy the same: conditionally you not performing it, I may enjoy your money. If that it be a match, speake, and I will acquaint you where

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* Compare *Much Ado about Nothing*, act ii. sc. 2.

she dwelleth : and besides, I vow, as I am a gentleman. not to give her notice of any such intent that is toward her. Sir, quoth the man, your proffer is faire, and I accept the same : so the mony was delivered into the oast of the house his hands, and the sitters by were witnesses : so drinking together like friends, they went every man to his chamber. The next day this man having knowledge of the place, rid thither, leaving the gentleman at the inne, who being assured of his wives chastitie, made no other account but to winne the wager, but it fell out otherwise : for the other vowed either by force, policie, or free will to get some jewell or other toy from her, which was enough to perswade the gentleman that he was a cuckold, and win the wager he had laid. This villaine (for hee deserved no better stile) lay at Waltam a whole day before he came to the sight of her : at last he espyed her in the fields, to whom he went and kissed her (a thing no modest woman can deny) : after his salutation, he said, Gentlewoman, I pray pardon me if I have beene too bold, I was intreated by your husband which is at London (I riding this way) to come and see you : by me he hath sent his commands to you, with a kinde intreat you that would not be discontented for his long absence, it being a serious businesse that keepes him from your sight. The gentlewoman very modestly bade him welcome, thanking him for his kindnes, withall telling him that her husband might command her patience so long as he pleased. Then intreated shee him to walke homeward, where shee gave him such

entertainment as was fit for a gentleman, and her husbands friend. In the time of his abiding at her house, he oft would have singled her in private talke, but she perceiving the same, (knowing it to bee a thing not fitting a modest woman) would never come in his sight but at meales, and there were there so many at boord, that it was no time to talke of love matters: therefore hee saw hee must accomplish his desire some other way: which he did in this maner: he having layne two nights at her house, and perceiving her to bee free from lustfull desires, the third night he fained himselfe to be something ill, and so went to bed timelier* then he was wont. When he was alone in his chamber, he began to think with himselfe that it was now time to do that which he determined; for if he tarried any longer, they might have cause to think that he came for some ill intent, and waited opportunity to execute the same: therefore he resolved to doe something that night, that might winne him the wager, or utterly bring him in despaire of the same. With this resolution he went to her chamber, which was but a paire of staires from his, and finding the doore open, he went in, placing himselfe under the bed: long had he not lyne there, but in came the gentlewoman with her maiden; who having been at prayers with her household, was going to bed. She preparing herselfe to bedward, laid her head-tyre and those jewels she wore, on a little table thereby: at length hee perceived her

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* Earlier. See *Antony and Cleopatra*, ii. 6.

to put off a littel crucifix of gold, which dayly she wore next to her heart: this jewell he thought fittest for his turne, and therefore observed where she did lay the same: at length the gentlewoman having untyred herselfe, went to bed: her maid then bolting of the doore, took the candle, and went to bed in a withdrawing roome onely seperated with arras.* This villaine lay still under the bed, lissning if hee could heare that the gentlewoman slept: at length he might heare her draw her breath long: then thought hee all sure, and like a cunning villaine rose without noise, going straight to the table, where finding the crucifix, he lightly went to the doore, which he cunningly unbolted. All this performed he with so little noise, that neither the mistris nor the maid heard him. Having gotten into his chamber, he wished for day, that he might carry this jewell to her husband as signe of his wives disloyaltie: but his wishes but in vaine, he laid him downe to sleepe: happy had shee beene had his bed proved his grave. In the morning, so soone as the folkes were stirring, he rose and went to the horse-keeper, praying him to helpe him to his horse, telling him that hee had tooke his leave of his mistris the last night. Mounting his horse, away rid he to London, leaving the gentlewoman in bed: who, when she rose, attiring herselfe hastily ('cause one tarried to speake with her) missed not her crucifix: so passed she the time away, as shee was wont other dayes to doe, no wit troubled in minde,

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* Tapestry made at Arras.

though much sorrow was toward her: onely shee seemed a little discontented that her ghest went away so unmannerly, she using him so kindely. So leaving her, I will speake of him, who the next morning was betimes at London; and comming to the inne, hee asked for the gentleman, who then was in bed, but he quickly rose and came down to him, who seeing him return'd so suddenly, he thought hee came to have leave to release himselfe of his wager: but this chanced otherwise: for having saluted him, he said in this manner: Sir, did not I tell you that you were too yong in experience of womans subtilties, and that no woman was longer good then she had cause, or time to doe ill? This you beleeved not, and thought it a thing so unlikely, that you have given me a hundred pounds for the knowledge of it. In briefe, know, your wife is a woman, and therefore a wanton, a changeling:* to confirme that I speake, see heere (shewing him the crucifix): know you this? If this be not sufficient proofe, I will fetch more. At the sight of this, his bloud left his face, running to comfort his faint heart, which was ready to breake at the sight of this crucifix, which he knew she alwayes wore next her heart, and therefore he must (as he thought) goe something neere, which stole so private a jewell. But remembering himselfe, he cheeres his spirits, seeing that was sufficient proofe, and he had wonne the wager, which hee commanded should be given to him. Thus was the

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* One who changes. See 1 *Henry IV.* v. 1.

poore gentleman abused, who went into his chamber, and being weary of this world (seeing where he had put onely his trust he was deceived) he was minded to fall upon his sword, and so end all his miseries at once: but his better genius perswaded him contrary, and not so (by laying violent hand on himselfe) to leape into the divels mouth. Thus being in many mindes, but resolving no one thing, at last he concluded to punish her with death, which had deceived his trust, and himselfe utterly to forsake his house and lands, and follow the fortunes of King Henry. To this intent he called his man, to whom he said; George, thou knowest I have ever held thee deare, making more account of thee then thy other fellowes, and thou hast often told me that thou diddest owe thy life to me, which at any time thou wouldest bee ready to render up to doe me good. True, sir, answered his man, I said no more there, then I will now at any time, whensoever you please, performe. I beleeve thee, George, (replyed he): but there is no such need: I onely would have thee doe a thing for me, in which is no great danger, yet the profit which thou shalt have thereby shall amount to my wealth: for the love that thou bearest to me, and for thy own good, wilt thou do this? Sir (answered George), more for your love, then any reward, I will doe it, (and yet money makes many men valiant) pray tell me what it is? George (said his master), this it is, thou must goe home, praying this mistris to meete me halfe the way to London: but having her by the way, in some private place kill her:

I meane as I speake, kill her, I say; this is my commande, which thou hast promised to performe: which, if thou performest not, I vow to kill thee the next time thou commest in my sight. Now for thy reward it shall be this, take my ring, and when thou hast done my command, by vertue of it, doe thou assume my place till my returne, at which time thou shalt know what my reward is; till then govern my whole estate: and for thy mistris absence, and my own, make what excuse thou please: so be gone. Well, sir (said George), since it is your will, though unwilling I am to doe it, yet I will performe it. So went he his way toward Waltam: and his master presently rid to the court, where hee abode with King Henry, who a little before was inlarged by the Earle of Warwicke, and placed in the throne againe. George, beeing come to Waltam, did his dutie to his mistris, who wondred to see him, and not her husband, for whom she demanded of George: he answered her, that hee was at Enfield, and did request her to meet him there. To which shee willingly agreed, and presently rode with him toward Enfield. At length they being come into a by-way, George began to speake to her in this manner: Mistris, I pray you tel me what that wife deserves, who, through some lewd behaviour of hers, hath made her husband to neglect his estate, and meanes of life, seeking by all meanes to dye, that he might be free from the shame, which her wickednesse hath purchased him? Why, George (quoth shee), hath thou met with some such creature? Be it whomsoever, might I be her judge, I

thinke her worthy of death: hou thinkest thou? Faith, mistris (said he), I thinke so too, and am so fully perswaded that her offence deserveth that punishment, that I purpose to bee executioner to such a one myselfe. Mistris, you are this woman; you have so offended my master (you know best how yourselfe) that he hath left his house, vowing never to see the same till you be dead, and I am the man appointed by him to kill you; therefore those words which you meane to utter, speake them presently, for I cannot stay. Poore gentlewoman, at the report of these unkinde words (ill deserved at her hands) she looked as one dead, and uttering aboundance of teares, she at last spake these words: And can it be that my kindnes and loving obedience hath merited no other reward at his hands then death? It cannot be. I know thou onely tryest me, how patiently I would endure such an unjust command. I'le tell thee heere, thus with body prostrate on the earth, and hands lift up to Heaven, I would pray for his preservation; those should be my worst words: for Death's fearfull visage shewes pleasant to that soule that is innocent. Why then, prepare yourselfe (said George): for, by Heaven, I doe not jest. With that shee prayed him stay, saying: And is it so? then what should I desire to live, having lost his favour (and without offence) whom I so dearely loved, and in whose sight my happinesse did consist? Come, let me die! Yet, George, let mee have so much favor at thy hands, as to commend me in these few words to him: tell him, my death I willingly imbrace,

for I have owed him my life (yet no otherwise but by a wives obedience) ever since I call'd him husband: but that I am guilty of the least fault toward him, I utterly deny: and doe (at this houre of my death) desire that Heaven would powre down vengeance upon me, if ever I offended him in thought. Intreat him that he would not speake ought that were ill on me, when I am dead, for in good troth I have deserved none. Pray Heaven blesse him; I am prepared now; strike prethee home, and kill me and my griefes at once. George, seeing this, could not withhold himselfe from shedding teares, and with pitie he let fall his sword, saying: Mistris, that I have used you so roughly pray pardon me, for I was commanded so by my master, who hath vowed, if I let you live, to kill me: but I, being perswaded that you are innocent, I will rather undergoe the danger of his wrath, then to staine my hands with the bloud of your cleere and spotlesse brest: yet let mee intreat you so much, that you would not come in his sight (lest in his rage he turne your butcher) but live in some disguise till time have opened the cause of his mistrust, and shewed you guiltlesse, which (I hope) will not be long. To this she willingly granted (being loth to die causelesse) and thanked him for his kindnes; so parted they both, having teares in their eyes. George went home, where he shewed his masters ring for the government of the house, till his master and mistris returne, which he said lived a while at London, 'cause the time was so troublesome, and that was a place where they were more secure then in

the countrey. This his fellowes beleeved, and were obedient to his will, amongst whom hee used himselfe so kindely, that he had all their loves. This poore gentlewoman (mistris of the house) in short time got mans apparell for her disguise; so wandred she up and downe the countrey, for she could get no service, because the time was so dangerous that no man knew whom hee might trust; onely she maintained herselfe with the price of those jewels which she had, all which she sold. At the last, being quite out of money, and having nothing left (which she could well spare) to make money of, she resolved rather to starve then so much to debase herselfe to become a begger: with this resolution she went to a solitary place beside York, where shee lived the space of two dayes on hearbs, and such things as she could there finde. In this time it chanced that King Edward (being come out of France, and lying thereabout with the small forces hee had) came that way with some two or three noblemen, with an intent to discover if any ambushes were laid to take him at an advantage. He seeing there this gentlewoman, whom he supposed to be a boy, asked her what she was and what she made there in that private place? To whom shee very wisely and modestly withall answered, that she was a poore boy, whose bringing up had bin better then her outward parts then shewed, but at that time she was both friendlesse and comfortlesse, by reason of the late warre. He, being moved to see one so well featur'd (as she was) to want, entertained her for one of his pages, to whom she shewed

herselfe so dutifull and loving, that (in short time) shee had his love above all her fellows. Still followed she the fortunes of K. Edward, hoping at last (as not long after it did fall out) to be reconciled to her husband. After the battell at Barnet (where K. Edward got the best) she going up and down amongst the slaine men (to know whether her husband, which was on K. Henries side, were dead or escaped) happened to see the other who had been her ghest, lying there for dead: she, remembring him, and thinking him to be one whom her husband loved, went to him, and finding him not dead, she caused one to helpe her with him to a house thereby: where opening of his brest, to dresse his wounds, she espied her crucifix; at sight of which her heart was joyfull (hoping by this to find him that was the originall of her disgrace) for she, remembring herselfe, found that she had lost that crucifix ever since that morning he departed from her house so suddenly: but saying nothing of it at that time, she caused him to be carefully looked unto, and brought up to London after her, whither she went with the king, carrying the crucifix with her. On a time when hee was a little recovered, shee went to him, giving him the crucifix, which shee had taken from about his necke: to whom hee said, Good gentle youth, keep the same: for now in my misery of sicknes, when the sight of that picture should be most comfortable, it is to me most uncomfortable, and breedeth such horrour in my conscience (when I think how wrongfully I got the same) that so long as I see it I shall never be in rest. Now knew

she that he was the man that caused the separation twixt her husband and herselfe; yet said shee nothing, using him as respectively* as she had before: only she caused the man, in whose house he lay, to remember the words he had spoken concerning the crucifix. Not long after, she being alone, attending on the king, beseeched his grace to doe her justice on a villain that had bin the cause of all the misery she had suffered. He loving her (above all his other pages) most dearely, said; Edmund (for so had she named herselfe), thou shalt have what right thou wilt on thy enemy; cause him to be sent for, and I will be thy judge myselfe. She being glad of this (with the kings authority) sent for her husband, whom she heard was one of the prisoners that was taken at the battell of Barnet, she appointing the other, now recovered, to be at the court the same time. They being both come (but not one seeing of the other), the king sent for the wounded man into the presence: before whom the page asked him, how he came by the crucifix? He fearing that his villany would come forth, denyed the words hee had said before his oast, affirming he bought it. With that she called in the oast of the house where he lay, bidding him boldly speake what he had heard this man say concerning the crucifix. The oast then told the king, that in the presence of this page, he heard him intreat that the crucifix might be taken from his sight, for it did wound his conscience, to thinke how wrong-

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* Respectfully.

fully he had gotten the same. These words did the page averre: yet he utterly denyed the same, affirming that he bought it, and if that he did speake such words in his sicknesse, they proceeded from the lightnesse of his braine, and were untruthes. She, seeing this villains impudency, sent for her husband in, to whom she shewed the crucifix, saying, Sir, doe you know, doe you know this? It was my wives, a woman vertuous, till this divell (speaking to the other) did corrupt her purity, who brought me this crucifix as a token of her inconstancie. With that, the king said, Sirra, now are you found to be a knave: did you not even now affirme you bought it? To whom he answered (with fearefull countenance), And it like your grace, I said so, to preserve this gentlemans honour, and his wives, which by my telling of the truth would have beene much indamag'd: for indeed she, being a secret friend of mine, gave me this as a testimony of her love. The gentlewoman, not being able longer to cover herselfe in that disguise, said, And it like your majesty, give mee leave to speake, and you shall see me make this villaine confesse how hee hath abused that good gentleman. The king, having given her leave, she said, First, sir, you confessed before your oast, and myselfe, that you had wrongfully got this jewell: then before his majestie, you affirmed you bought it: so denying your former words: now you have denyed that which you so boldly affirmed before, and have said it was this gentlemans wives gift. (With his majesties leave) I say thou art a villaine, and this is likewise false. With

that she discovered herselfe to be a woman, saying: Hadst thou (villaine) ever any strumpets favour at my hands? Did I (for any sinfull pleasure I received from thee) bestow this on thee? Speake, and if thou have any goodnes left in thee, speake the truth. With that, he being daunted at her sudden sight, fell on his knees before the king, beseeching his grace to be mercifull unto him, for he had wronged that gentlewoman: therewith told he the king of the match betweene the gentleman and himselfe, and how he stole the crucifix from her, and, by that meanes, perswaded her husband that she was a whore. The king wondred how hee durst (knowing God to be just) commit so great villany: but much more admired he to see his page to turn a gentlewoman; but ceasing to admire, he said: Sir, (speaking to her husband) you did the part of an unwise man to lay so foolish a wager, for which offence the remembrance of your folly is punishment inough: but seeing it concernes me not, your wife shall be your judge. With that Mistris Dorrill (thanking his majestie) went to her husband, saying: all my anger to you I lay downe with this kisse. He, wondring all this while to see this strange and unlooked for change, wept for joy, desiring her to tell him how she was preserved: wherein she satisfied him at full. The king was likewise glad that hee had preserved this gentlewoman from wilfull famine, and gave judgement on the other in this manner: That he should restore the money treble which he had wrongfully got from

him :* and so was to have a yeeres imprisonment. So this gentleman and his wife went (with the kings leave) lovingly home, where they were kindely welcomed by George, to whom for recompence hee gave the money which he received: so lived they ever after in great content. How like you of this woman? Some praised her (as shee deserved) extraordinarily.

But (said the Brainford fishwife) I like her as a garment out of fashion; shee shewed well in that innocent time, when women had not the wit to know their owne libertie: but if she lived now, she would shew as vild as a paire of Yorkeshire sleeves in a goldsmithes shop. But wee being come almost at Brainford, I asked if any of them would land there? They all cryed, No: perswading the two wives that dwelt at Brainford, and Stand on the Greene, to goe to King-stone, whither they purposed all to goe and be merry. Little intreating served them: so putting their fish-baskets aboord a fisher-boate, they cryed, On to King-stone. I, being well content therewith, set forward, and the fishwife of Richmond proceeded in telling of her tale: but first I will tell you what manner of creature she was.

THE FISHWIFE OF RICHMOND.

This Richmond dame
Was voyd of shame;

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* In Boccacio, the villain, there named Ambrogiulo, was put to a cruel death, and his wealth, which was immense, was given to the injured wife.

She was a scold
At ten yeeres old :
And now was held
The best in field,
At same fight
'Twas her delight.
Her husband kinde
(A silly hinde)
Durst not gainsay,
Or once say nay,
For what she crav'd :
For then she rav'd,
And call'd him foole,
And with a stoole
Would breake his head.
Oft in the bed
If he her tutch'd,
His beard she clutch'd,
And claw'd his eyes :
Yet in no wise
Durst he resist
Her cruell fist.
This wife was yong :
Onely in tongue
She was deform'd :
Had that beene charm'd,*
She had deserv'd
A king to ha' serv'd.

Her tale.—Not long agone, in a town not farre from London, dwelt an old widdower, which tooke to wife a faire, yong and lusty damozell, over whom his owne weakenesse made him jealous, so that continually his

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* Compare *Othello*, act v. sc. 2.

eye was on her, and she could not looke awry, but with most spitefull words he would revile her, calling her so many whores, that it was unpossible to make him so many times cuckold: this poore wench lived so miserable a life with him, that she rather wished to be with the dead, then to live with so froward and such a doting old foole: but her wishes were in vaine, and her misery still increased: for he complained to her friends, how that she shewed not that dutie to him, which other wives did to their husbands, but slighted him as it had beene a stranger, and that shee delighted in other mens companies more then his. Upon this complaint of his, shee had likewise the ill will of her friends, who told her they would continue her foes, till they heard she used her husband with more respect. At this shee grieved more then at her husbands frowardnes, having their hate without a cause: and being one day at church, she made mone to her pew-fellow (which was a wench that would not be out-faced by her husbands great lookes) telling her how ill her husband used her, for when hee was within doores, his eyes were never off her, so that she could not speake to any friend: and if he went forth, he would locke her in the house, like pusse-cat; and every night he locked the doore himselfe, laying the key under his pillow. Why, said her pew-fellow, wherefore have you hands, but to take the key when hee is asleepe, and to goe whither you will, onely you must be carefull to come in at the houre he useth to wake? Fie, I am ashamed, that you have no more wit! Doe as I tell you, and since he bar-

reth you of your libertie in the day, take it yourselfe in the night: for company take no care, come to me; and if wee cannot finde sport to passe away the time, wee will sleepe for company. This yong lasse thanked her for her counsell, vowing to put it in practice the next night, whatsoever did happen: so returning from the church with her husband, she went home, where all the day she sate demurely in his sight, as she was wont to doe, yet could shee scarce have one good word from him. Night being come, he locked the door as he was wont, and going to bed, he layed the key under his pillow, falling quickly asleep, which she perceiving, softly tooke the same, opening the doore therewith: away she went to her pew-fellow where she revelled that night, till three of the clocke in the morning, at which time her husband used to wake: then comming home, she softly opened the doore, locking the same againe with as little noise as she could: then laid she herselfe downe by her good man, who, when he waked, never mistrusted that his wife had stirred from his side: this did shee many times, and never was so much as suspected for such a matter. One night above the rest* (her good fortune having made her bold) she tarrying a little longer then her houre, her husband chanced to awake, who presently missing her, call'd her by her name, thinking she had beene in the house: he, hearing no answere, rose and went about the house to looke her, but could not set his eyes on her, and to

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* *Above the rest*, especially.

aske for her was in vaine, for his cat could not speake, and he had no other to inquire of: for his cat, his wife, and himselfe, was all the houshold he had. To bed went this old man againe, where hee looked for the key, but could finde none: there he lay, vexing and chafing himselfe, ever and anon feeling on his browes, which he perswaded himselfe were in their spring-time, and would shortly bring forth fruit: though the rest of his body were in autumns. At length he might heare a noise, and lying still, he might perceive his wife come stealing to the bed, to whom hee said nothing, hoping one night to take her out of the doores, where hee would keepe her to her everlasting shame, and give the parish notice of her night-walking: so taking no notice that he knew any thing, he used her that day very kindly, which made her to beleeve that the proverbe is true (cuckolds are kinde men), for before she played loose with him, she never had that good usage at his hand, as she had that day found. This encouraged her to goe on in these her mad prankes, so that the same night she purposed to walke againe, which she did, taking the key from under his pillow (as she was wont to doe) she unlocked the doore, and away she went to her pew-fellow: hee perceiving it (for he slept for sleepe) went downe, and bolted the doore after her, so that she could not come in, but he must know of it: when he had so done, he layd him downe to sleepe. His wife ending her revels, at her usuall houre returned home, and very quietly assayed to open the doore: but perceiving that it was bolted on the

inside, her heart was dead (as a spent prodigals at the sight of a sergeant): then repented shee that shee had taken that wanton course, knowing a severe punishment would follow her sweet pleasure: thus shee, poore soule, stood at the doore shaking with feare, more than cold: but at last (having no other way to get in) she resolved to knocke: so laying her hand gently on the ring of the doore, she knocked twise or thrise before hee would heare her. At last, hee looked out of the window, asking who knockt at the doore? Tis I, kinde husband, (answered shee) that have beene at a womans labour; prethee, sweet heart, open the doore. All these kinde words would not get her admittance, but gained this churlish answere at his hands: Hast thou beene at a womans labour? Then prethee, sweet heart, returne, and amongst the residue of the wives, help thou to devoure the groning cheese,* and sucke up the honest mans ale till you are drunke; by that time 'twill be day light, and I will have thy friends at thy returne, who shall give thee thankes for thy charitie. The poore woman knew his wicked mind toward her by these his mocking words, yet sought she to pacifie the same, saying, Alas, kinde love, these things are done already; therefore, pray open the doore. No (quoth he), avaunt, whore; damn'd whore, avaunt! Heere is no place: your labours have not deserved such fruits at my hands: no, I have taken you,

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* This was a cheese formerly provided by the husband on the occasion of a birth.

you are intrapt, you are snared, your friends shall now know, and all the world see, that you are a most cunning whore: therefore rest quiet, for there you shall stand till morning. This sharpe answere of his kild her heart; but she quickly revived the same with a tricke which she hoped would get her admittance, which she put in execution after this manner. Am I rewarded thus (quoth she) for my charitie toward a poore distressed woman? And is this thy thankes thou givest mee for all my care which I have had of thy old and crazed carkasse? I see it is: therefore will I live no longer, but presently will make away myselfe, and with myselfe thee, for the world judging thee to bee author of my death, will give thee the punishment that is due unto a murderer. At this the old man laughed, bidding her proceed. Which she hearing, tooke up a great stone, going therewith to a pond which was within a yards length of her house, and standing at the brink, said these words: Oh! blessed element of water, it is thou which wast ordained to end my misery, and to revenge me on my wicked husband: therewith hurled she in the stone, which made a great noise: then placed shee herselfe hard by the doore. Her husband thinking shee had leaped in, and considering what danger hee might come in if shee was drowned, ranne hastily out of doore to helpe her: which his wife seeing, stept in, bolting of him forth.* The old man

* An incident exactly similar to this occurs in the romance of the *Seven Sages*. See Mr. Wright's edition, printed for the Percy Society, 1845, p. 48.

stood a long time looking with his spectacles on the pond: but perceiving nothing to stirre, hee thought her to be drowned, and with that cryed out he was undone: long inough might he cry, for no neighbours dwelt neere him: at length his wife pittied him, saying, Alas, good man, what wouldst thou have? He hearing it to be his wives voice, was glad thereof: yet continuing his churlish speeches unto her, he bid her open the doore, calling her dissembling queane. To all this said she nothing: but at last she tooke occasion to emptie the . . . . . on his head, and then said: There is some cuckolds . . . . . to coole your tongues heat: I'le warrant thee it is right, 'tis of my husbands making: so prethee, fellow, bee gone, and let me sleepe. This abuse of hers made the old man to raile more then before: but at last, seeing he could get nothing thereby, hee gave her good words, intreating her to let him in, and hee would forgive all that was past, never letting his friends understand of her night-walking. Shee, seeing him so meeke, said, Old man, I could well afford thee shelter in my house, thou hast not deserved the same: but in so doing I shall breake my oath, for I have sworne that thou shalt not come through the doore not this five houres: now to save my oath, and doe the pleasure (in taking thee out of the cold) I will open the window in the lower room, that thou mayst come in that way. Her husband being glad any way to get out of the cold, thanked her for that kindnes. Downe came she straight and opened that window: the old man glad thereof, thrust in his head, praying her

to helpe him. She now thinking it time to bee revenged on him, tooke hold of his beard, and with her other fist batterd his face, and scratched him in such pitious manner, that the old man thought shee would have killed him: and therefore, pulling his head out of the window, he all be-battered the casements with stones, calling her a hundred whores. At this she laughed, and bid him bee a patient cuckold, for his greatest misery was to come; so going to a backe window, shee espyed a boy, whom she called, willing him to goe to such a ones house (naming her pew-fellow) and intreat her straight to come and speake with her. The boy doing her errand, her pew-fellow came: to whom shee told (not without great laughing) the whole story of her good hap; willing her to goe to her mother, and the rest of her friends, and (as she could well inough without her instructions) frame a complaint, how that her husband of a long time had used to goe on whore-hunting in the night: yet shee, having no just proofe of the same, was loth to speake: but now it was her hap to take him forth of the doores, where she would keep him, till they came to take some order that she might be seperated from him, for she feared her life. With this tale ran her pew-fellow to her friends (which dwelled not farre off) to whom she told such a pitious story of the miserable life their poore kinswoman led with that knowne and proved old adulterer; that her friends moved with the wrong she sustained, got the parson of the towne to goe with them to their kinswomans house, that hee might be a

witnesse of her wrong. When they came thither, they found the old man sitting at the doore, with a face more deformed (with beating and scratching) then ever was any witches. The mother to this lusty lasse, seeing him sit there with such a deformed face) raised her voice to a high key, saying: Ah, thou old knave, thou whoremonger, thou decrepit lecher, hast thou alwayes complained of my daughter, making mee, and other that are her good friends, not onely to reprove her, but more (which I speake to my griefe) to hate her, for her neglect of dutie toward thee, when the fault was in thyselfe, when thou gavest her right to others? But see, now it is come home by thee, shee hath intrapt thee in thy snare; thou art come home with thy face mangled like a true ruffian: now thou art the true picture of a brothell-house companion: thou hast the seales on thy face, which those creatures (called whores) doe give: thou hast, villaine, thou hast. He wondering to see her mother so against him, of whom he hoped to be righted, said: Mother, I confesse these seales are the seales of a whore; but of what whore? Even of what whore thou wilt (quoth she): thou knave, hold thy tongue, confesse not heere, keepe that for the gallowes. Beare witnesse, good Sir John,* and the rest of my neighbours, that see how my daughter is abused: for I purpose to teach this knave how to use his wife better; and not to abuse her, and then threaten her with death, if she complaine: come downe, my

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* This is, of course, addressed to the priest.

child, and speake for thyselfe, and let the knave touch thee if he dare. The yong wife liked this well, who came downe as her mother bid her; and falling at her feet, intreated her (with fained teares) that she might be divorced from her wicked husband, or else shee said her dayes were but short, for he assuredly would doe her a mischiefe. Content thee, daughter (said her mother) I will have him consent to let thee goe, giving thee that portion hee had with thee, or else I will sell cow, coat, house and all, to goe to law with the knave. The old man (her husband) perceiving that they were all on her side, and how that they would not heare him speake in his owne defence: likewise thinking if that hee lived with his wife againe, he must be a contented cuckold, said, will you heare this? Take your daughter with you: and I will presently give her that portion I received, and take all this wrong. This pleased them all; so the priest drew a bill of divorce betweene them, and the old man delivered backe her portion, beeing glad that he was rid of his wife. His wife on the other side was glad that she had escaped that punishment which shee deserved: so they all parted seeming friends.

I, marry, (quoth the fishwife of Brainford) this was a wench worth talking of; she deserveth as much praise as those women called Amazones, who out of a brave minde cut their husbands throates, and so made themselves rulers of themselves. But what praise (quoth the wife of Stand on the Greene) had shee deserved, if she had been discovered, or failed in this attempt? Nothing but curses in my minde, for she had given

cause to all men to speake ill of us women: it is not the event, but the honesty of the intent, that justifies the action. I thinke so too, said a fishwife of Twitnam; I doe not like this foolish hardinesse: and men are apt to speake ill of us without cause: therefore, to make amends, I will tell of a vertuous and chaste dame, one whose life may bee a mirrour for all women.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHWIFE OF TWITNAM.

Not old, not young,
Not sharpe of tongue
Was this same wife.
She lov'd no strife,
Nor much would prate,
But lov'd her mate.
Yet lov'd she lap:
If 't were her hap
To meete with those,
She knew from foes,
She'd spend her quart
With all her heart.
Well lov'd she masse.
Her time she'd passe
In working good:
If neighbours stood
In neede of ought
She sold or bought,
They should it have,
If they did crave.
This wife mannerly
Spake thus soberly.

Her tale.—Sometime in Brittaine there raigned a mighty prince, called Oswald, who for his just govern-

ment and holy life, had the name of Saint given. This Oswald tooke to his wife a vertuous maiden, named Beblam, daughter to Kynygils, king of West-Saxons, by whom he had one sonne, after whose birth they willingly agreed (that they might the better serve their Saviour) not to touch one the other after any carnall manner. Thus lived this vertuous couple, untill their deaths, onely esteeming the service of God, and the avoiding of worldly tentations,* for their chiefe pleasure. A hermit, being envious at the report of his holy life, one day went to him, asking the king how hee could live so holy, and yet live with a wife? To whom the king answered: Marriage is no hinderance to holy life, for therein doe we but follow the institution of God, which hee ordained for the increase of the world: but further to satisfie thee, that it is no hinderance to my holy life, take thou this ring, and goe to her, bidding her use thee as she would use myselfe. The hermet glad of this (hoping to have kinde entertainment at his Queenes hands) went merrily to her, delivering her the ring: and told her, that it was her husbands will that she should use him in all respects as shee would use himselfe, if hee were there. To this the queene was willing, and bid him welcome, telling him he should be served in all points as the king her royall husband was. When the time of supper

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* Temptation; trial. So in an early manuscript poem,—

Nor's any place exempted from *tentation*,
Save Heaven, to ill that never had relation.

was come, and the hermet expected some delicate cheere, he onely was fed with bread, which was served up in a stately manner by divers gentlemen that did attend him: likewise when he called for drink, they gave him wholesome water to coole his hote desires: no other cates* got hee, yet was it no worse then the queene herselfe ate of. This stately service, and homely fare, scarce pleased the hermet, yet still he hoped for better, but his hopes were vaine, for the cloth was taken up, and one asked him if hee pleased to goe to bed? To this hee was willing, hoping now to sleepe out the remembrance of his hard fare: but being come to his chamber, sodaine joy extinguished the griefe he would have slept out, for he saw no worser woman then the queene should be his bedfellow. So quickly undressing himselfe, he went to bed to her (not forgetting in his thoughts to praise her for obeying her husbands will), where having lyne a while, thinking of some strange things, lust and the evill disposition of his minde beganne to infect his soule so, that with a kinde imbrace hee besought the queene to shew some mercy towards his affection. This vertuous queene, seeing this, rung a bell: then presently came in foure women, who took this hermet and cast him in a cisterne full of water, that stood in the chamber: he being well cooled, they tooke him forth, placing him in the bed as they found him. There hee lay shivering with cold a good space; but

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* Provisions. See *Taming of the Shrew*, ii. 1.

at length his bloud being heated, hee fell to thinking with himselfe how perchance the queene shewed herselfe thus chaste, to take suspition from her women. His lust, seconding this opinion, made him once more venture a ducking: so turning himselfe to the queene, he began with this speech: Most rare, beauteous, admirable, and unparalelled woman, I will not onely commend thee for thy beauty, and greatnesse of birth and place; but also I will adore thee with more then humane worship, for the extraordinarie understanding which thou hast above others of thy sexe. With what a grave and sober carriage doest thou hide thy hote affections, which inwardly doe burne thee! Oh it is strange! therewith not onely blinding the eyes of strangers, but also thy neerest attendants: now I conceive why thou commandest mee to bee hurled in the water cisterne, it was thy policy (thou wonder of thy sexe) to avoid suspition in thy servants. I knew this well, and therefore did willingly endure the same, that I might the more freely enjoy thy beauty now: therewith 'gan he clip* her in his armes; which shee perceiving, rung the bell: her women presently comming in, tooke this yongster, ducking him twise so much as they did before, so that they laid him in the bed halfe drowned: and having done, presently voided they the chamber. The hermet being come to himselfe, had a better opinion of K. Oswald and his wife, for he then held them for the holyest people in England: and his

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* Embrace. See *Anth. and Cleop.* iv. 8.

hote bloud being cooled, he lay still that night, not daring to stirre, lest she giving the alarum, his enemies would come upon him and put their crueltie in execution. The morning being come, hee kindely tooke his leave of the queene, telling her he had sufficiently tryed the kings severe and holy life, and would ever after give testimonie of the same : so went he to his cell, being ashamed of this his foolish attempt, and never after would looke into other mens lives, but mended his owne. She having ended her tale, they all said this queene was a vertuous woman, and worthy to bee had in memory, but shee was not to be any president for them, seeing shee was a queene, and they were but fishwives. Truely (quoth a fishwife of Kingstone that sate next to her) if wee would bee thus chaste, alas ! our husbands would not suffer us to continue so ; therefore for my part, I will never goe about it : I will tell you a tale of one that was a great woman (though she was no queene) and yet kept a friend besides her husband.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHWIFE OF KINGSTONE.

This Kingstone wife
Lov'd little strife :
She was a bosse,
That lov'd to tosse
The ale pot round.
Few was there found
Could with her drinke,
But they would winke,
And fall asleepe:
Till she would creepe,

She'd not give ore,
But call for more,
Loving the pot,
All lost she not :
For she had got
A nose full hot,
And red as bloud.
Within it stood
Di'monds shining :
Lower declining
Stood a rubie.
If I true be,
There were more
Then halfe a score,
Which shewed like
The sparkes you strike
From forth a flint:
Such heat was in't.
Men might suppose
(Seeing her nose)
What broth she lov'd.
When she had mov'd
Herselfe, and spit,
She spake this writ.

Her tale.—A certaine great lady, having to her husband a man old and unfit to her, asked her confessor whether she might not enjoy a friend which might supply her want. The fryer (hoping shee would make choise of him) told her she might, for the sinne was but little, and did deserve little or no penance. She thanked him for this kinde absolution, telling him she onely tooke this carefull course, that her husband might not die without issue, having his memory buried

with him in the dust. The priest (still hoping he was the man she would select) said, her care was good, and no whit offensive, if she chose a friend that would keepe it from the world. She said, her diligence would choose such a one, and so they parted: the priest being still in the minde that he should be the man. But this lady meant otherwise: for she chose a gentleman that sometime had beene a suter unto her, who loving her dearely, and she him, they enjoyed each others company without suspect* of any, onely two of her trusty servants knowing of it. The priest perceiving he was not the man appointed for this businesse, vexed himselfe in thinking what a foole he was, that he did not make proffer of his service, when shee first opened her minde unto him. Thus thinking of her beauty, and his neglect, hee vowed to performe something which might give him content; with this resolve went hee to a pleasant walke thereby, where oftentimes the lady used; there, having obscured† himselfe, he might perceive her with her lover comming that way. He lying close, and listening to heare something that might bee for his advantage: amongst other things he heard her aske why hee had chosen Hercules for his watch-word, seeing there were many words, and names, which were more proper to that busines? The priest stayed not to heare his answer (thinking he had enough in knowing that word which had the power to bring

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* Suspicion. See *Comedy of Errors*, iii. 1.

† Hid. Compare *As You Like It*, i. 1.

him to her bed) but closely got him home, waiting the comming of night, which he prayed might hasten on, that hee might enjoy the pleasure he so wished for. To be short, her friend and shee parted when they saw time, and night being come, she went to bed, where she lay alone (for her old husband was at court) : long had she not lyen there, but the priest (beeing well acquainted with all the turnings in the house) came to her chamber-doore and knockt : she asked who was there ? Hercules, quoth the priest. With that she rose, and (thinking it to be her sweet-heart) let him in. The priest caught her in his armes, kissing and using other dalliance, so long, till hee had fully satisfied his desires : then quietly tooke hee his leave without words, which she wondred at. Long had he not been gone, when came her sweet-heart, who softly knocked at the chamber-doore : she hearing it, asked who was there ? Hercules, said he. She, wondring at his sudden return, opened the doore, and asked him why hee came ? To enjoy thy sweet company (said hee) and to passe away this night in such sports as shall content us both. She wondring to see him, and hee not knowing what shee meant (and thinking she mis-doubted his loyaltie), prayed her to tell him the meaning of those words, which seemed more strange to him, then rattling Welch, or wilde Irish : and he protested likewise, that but even then he came from his chamber. The lady now knew that shee was deceived, and that some craftie knave had got at her hands a more then ordinarie kindnesse : and 'cause he should suspect nothing, she

told him that shee dreamed she had injoyed his company that night, and that he parted from her after an unkinde manner. Tut, said he, dreames are but false shaddowes: now hast thou the substance those shaddowes did present. With such loving words passed they the night: and morning being come, her friend kindely tooke his leave, secretly going to his chamber. She being vexed in her minde that she was deceived, and not knowing by whom, passed away that day, hoping ere long to entrap her cunning lover. Night being come, after her usual manner she went to bed, where she had not long beene, but the priest came to the doore, softly knocking. She hoping it was he she looked for, went to the doore, demanding who was there? Hercules, said the priest: she knowing it to be him (by his voice) that had deceived her, prayed Hercules to come in: and under colour of using him kindely, she felt by the short haire on his head, that it was the priest. Being glad she had found her too officious friend, she intreated him to repose himselfe on the bed, till shee cleered the house of some servants that she heard up in the next roome: to which the priest was very willing, being loth to be descryed at his going forth by any of the houshold servants. But shee had another meaning: for shee called up her two servants, servants which she trusted with her chiefe secrets, bidding them go into her chamber, where they should find the priest, whom they should binde, and with a sharpe knife (which shee gave to them) cut him. They obeying her command, rushed into the

chamber, where they found the priest (fearing the noise he heard) crept under the bed, whom they drew out by the heeles, and bound his hands and feete. The priest seeing them handle him thus roughly, intreated them to forbeare, saying, he was a Church-man, and it was sacriledge to offer him violence. He, seeing this prevailed him nothing, set out his throat: but they soone stopped the same, and with a sharpe knife, and a quick hand, made him lighter. Then called they their lady, who seemed to pitie Sir John, and bid them binde up his wound, putting thereto salve which she gave them. They, having done this, shee hung a paper about his neck, bidding them unbinde him, and turne him foerth the doores: which they performed, and shutting the doore after him, they went to bed laughing. The poore priest hyed him home, getting to bed, where he tooke little rest for the paine hee felt; but he passed away the night in cursing the lady, on whom hee could not tell how to be revenged. The morning being come, hee espyed the writing which hung about his neck, hee opening the same, found therein this written.

Priest, if that thou chance to tell,
What pleasure through thy wit befell:
Likewise report not without care,
What thou hast lost, and what they are.
So, Sir, farewell: th' ast made amends
For thy deceit, and we are friends.

At this the fryer bit his lip, wishing he had as much power over her life, as he had over that paper: but not knowing how to mend himselfe, but by looking to

this wound, hee rested himselfe content, and ventured to steale no more flesh : and the lady injoyed her friend quietly, being never after troubled with the fryer.

Now tell me (quoth this fishwife) if this lady bee not as much praiseworthy for her wit, as the other was for her honestie ? Most of them confirmed her argument to be sound, and the rest confirmed it by their silence. Then the last fishwife, which was of Hampton, said, But for a woman out of the abundance of her wit, to abuse any man, or herselfe, in such dishonest courses, I thinke it not good : 'cause oftentimes the harme which shee intendeth, and the shame which shee deserveth, lighteth on herselfe : which I will make good by this example.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE FISHWIFE OF HAMPTON.

This same creature
Had a feature,
Would have mov'd
A man to have lov'd.
A body sound,
A face full round;
A forehead hye,
A full black eye;
A soft bright haire,
A skin full faire;
A colour ruddy,
And not muddy.
A chin dimpled,
Nose not pimpled;
She had a lip,
Would make one skip
To have a bit,
So sweet was it !

Shee'd not lowre,
And looke sowre ;
Nor in feasting.
Be protesting,
She was no such :
But shee'd bide tuch.
Beauties rich store,
And eke much more
Of honest goodnesse :
And hated lewdnesse.

Her tale.—In Devonshire sometime there dwelt a maiden, to whom nature (having beene something liberall) gave such beauty, that she in all mens judgements was held the comeliest and fairest creature in all those parts : she being a right woman, tooke notice of her good parts, and withall grew so proud, that she rewarded all those which honestly sought to enjoy her love, either with scoffes or unkinde denials. A yong gentleman of that countrey long time loved this same unkind and unmatched creature, but never could he receive better comfort at her hands, then unkinde answeres, or scornefull lookes. One day (not willing to live longer betweene hope and feare) hee resolved to have of her either a flat deniall, or firme grant, and with this resolution went to her, to whom he spake after this manner : Faire Millisant, long time (amongst other of your suters) have I dearely loved you, yet never did I receive the least token of acceptance at your hands : disdaine you my birth ? I am a gentleman, though not descended of the highest houses, yet not of the meanest. Dislike you my wealth ? I have

enough to maintaine a private gentleman. Dislike you my parts of body? They are as nature gave them. I could wish they were more pleasing to your minde. Do you mis-doubt my love to you? Set mee some taske in mans possibility to performe, and it shall confirme the same. Tell me for what it is you cannot love me, and I will reforme the same, and by fashioning myselfe to your liking, give you testimonie of my love. No whit was she moved with his pure love, but after her usuall manner determined to abuse the same; and to that purpose she answered him thus: Sir, such little libertie hath our sexe, and men such corrupt judgements, that our mirth is counted immodesty, our civillest lookes lascivious, our words loose, our attires wanton, and all our doings apish: to shunne these slanders, it behooveth us to bee carefull over ourselves, and not through our kindnesses to give inconstant and dissembling men occasion to speake ill. I taxe not you with this common fault; yet have I had no proofe that your love is any other then dissembling; therefore till I have made proofe of the same, by your obedience in executing my will, looke not for any kinde favour at my hands. The words gave him some hope: and he being willing to expresse his love to her, desired her to acquaint him with that taske whose performance would give him that great happinesse of her love: and he vowed to doe it, excepting no danger. Shee seeing him thus blinde with her love, that for her sake hee would undergoe any danger, with a cruell and unmerciful heart uttered these words: Sir, I shall try you

whether your love is of that purenesse you praise it for; I charge you, as ever you did respect me, or hope to injoy me, for this two yeeres comming to keepe a voluntary silence, not speaking to any creature living, or to sing, or use any kinde of sound, whereby your meaning may be understood: this is my pleasure, which if you performe not, never see me: if you will do it, let your silence and sudden departure be signe of consent. The gentleman hearing this unkind taske, was almost struck dead with griefe, yet said he nothing, but observing her command, presently departed with silence. Being thus silenced by that unmercifull maid, hee left his friends, and went into Cornwal, where he was entertained by the duke (hee being an excellent musician) to teach his children to dance and play on sundry instruments wherein he had skill. In his service he bore himselfe so worthily, and used such diligence in his teaching the children, that the duke delighted in his company above all other gentlemen, and sought all the meanes that was for the recovery of his speech: but seeing all this cost was in vaine, and that the phisicians did him no good, he caused it to be published, that whosoever could restore his speech, five hundred pounds should be their reward: but they not performing the cure, should give the duke so much mony, or else have imprisonment till they paid it. This large, but fearefull promise, was spred all o're the countrey thereabouts: and comming to faire Millisants eare, she laughed, and to thinke that she could with one word doe that, which so great a duke could not

undoe, with all his expence and care. She knowing it was in her power to restore his speech, and being covetous of the great reward, she went into Cornwall, proffering herselfe before the duke to performe the cure, or undergoe the punishment. The Duke being glad that hee had one that would undertake the cure, bid her take her time for the performance of it : shee set down three weeks, and that she not performing it in that time, was lyable to his sharpest punishment : so with a good courage did she begin her cure. The gentleman seeing his hard-hearted love come to be his physician, would neither by signe, or any word make knowne, that he had any remembrance what she was, but seemed to her as to a stranger, though she gave him many kinde words, excusing her rash folly, in that she knew him not to be of that worth and estimation, which she now saw he was of. All this would get never a word from him ; which shee seeing, intreated to breake that rash and foolish vow she had caused him to make, and she would give him sufficient testimony of her love : thus continued she the space of twelve dayes, but could never get any cheerefull looke at his hand : she now fearing he would be revenged on her, and by his wilfull silence suffer her either to pay the money, or else to lye in prison, with a kinde and loving countenance said these words to him : Sir, if ever you loved me (as you vowed you did) let not my former unkindnesse be any longer cause of your neglecting mee ; my teares are sufficient testimony of the griefe I have for it, and I doe proffer up my love to you as sa-

tisfaction for my former fault: oh then be mercifull, and loving me, forgive mee that offence, and through my loving duty, let mee possesse your former good opinion of me: with these words she kissed him, using other toying to cause him speake. All this prevailed her nothing, for he did not affoord her one word: yet with a seeming unwillingnesse did hee accept her imbraces, which he so long enjoyed, that hee made her sure for leaving apes in hell.* But to be short, her last day she set to performe the cure was come, and she could not for all her kindnesse get one word of him: and the duke seeing her folly (in undertaking his cure, and not performing it) caused her to be imprisoned, where shee lay (not being able to pay the money was promised as reward to her if she had cured him) till the space of his two yeeres were expired. That time being come, he went to the duke, intreating him to pardon his long wilfull silence, caused by an unmercifull woman, withall telling him who it was, and the whole story of his love, and how he had used her for tyrannie. The duke was exceeding joyfull to heare him speake, and praised his wit for using so ungentle a person so untowardly: yet blamed him withall, for keeping so rash, foolish, and unreasonable a vow so straightly: but both having had penance enough for their folly, hee pardoned them both, continuing his love to the gentleman, and releasing her, who by that time had got the fruit of her owne physicke, but he that owed the fruit would not acknowledge it: so that shee

* Compare *Much Ado about Nothing*, ii. 1.

was to looke a new customer, or else endure the open shame belonging to a strumpet: which of them she did, I know not, eyther of them was bad enough: and had that gentlewoman had no better fortune in abusing the fryer, then this by exercising her wit on this gentleman, shee had deserved no more then this foolish woman doth.

It is true (said the Brainford fishwife): and since it concernes us not, let us leave this pro and contra, let every tub stand on its owne bottom: and so our mirth and journey ends about one time: for yonder is Kingstone, whose large and conscionable pots* are praised throughout England; whose ale is of great strength and face, as our westerne watermens sicke braines can witnesse. Then since it is so neere, let us not bee factious, and contend for trifles; but let us seeke to enjoy that which we came for, mirth: that best preserver of our lives: so land us with all speed, honest waterman.

They, hearing her speake but reason, agreed to be ruled by her, and therefore gave her the name of Captaine. With all haste and ease as I could possible, landed I my merry fare of fishwives, who went straight to the signe of the Beare, where they found such good liquor, that they stayed by it all night: where I left them, and so ended my journey WESTWARD FOR SMELTS.

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* Alluding to the Kingston ale.

FINIS.

BSB Bayerische StaatsBibliothek
MDZ Münchener DigitalisierungsZentrum Digitale Bibliothek

Kit, Kinde

Westward for smelts an early collection of stories

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